* LIGHT SCULPTURE

Electric light and the industrial production of transparent materials nightly transform our cities into a shimmering fairy-world, the grand spectacle of this century. Volumes and planes lose material existence under the simultaneous action of interior and exterior night-lights, which "break up the solid forms as the measuring unit of space", as Gyorgy Kepes remarked almost twenty-five years ago. "The fluctuating, vibrating light-patterns cannot be fitted together into an optically modelled form. A spatial interpretation can be achieved only by assuming a more dynamic unit than the illusory forms sculptured by light and shadow . . ."[1]

But light has affected the artist on the scientific and cultural, as well as visual and technological levels. From the birth of humanity, life-giving light, our only connecting link with the rest of the universe, had been deified and worshipped. In our matter-of-fact civilization, it still manages to keep its preponderant position: it is the foundation stone, if not the focal point, of a great part of modern science, to mention alone the quanta and relativity theories (1900 and 1905), and undulatory mechanics (1925), which not only proved that matter and light are the same, but also that matter follows the laws of light. If the century of Newton opened with El Greco and Caravaggio, to culminate with Rembrandt and Bernini; if the century of electricity gave birth to cinematography; is it possible that the century of Einstein would not respond with equal splendour in terms of light-art?

The art of sculpture itself, due to its earlier development, was ready to carry the results of these new interests. The increasing neglect of polychromy in sculpture since the Renaissance had lead inevitably to the replacement of color by chiaroscuro--therefore to a livelier modelling. Love of texture (already present in Michelangelo) was another by-product of the elimination of polychromy, which again allowed light a more fanciful role. Moreover, the gradual abandonment of representation throughout the first quarter of this century favored a bolder use of light: the statue of a human figure cannot easily stand deforming illuminations, and does not readily lend itself to the use of high-polish or transparency, whereas abstract sculpture happily welcomes such effects. Finally, in its incontestable yielding of mass to space and its elaboration of the void and the silhouette, modern sculpture again adopted transparent and shiny materials, or developed concave forms, interior shadows and even cast shadows.

Sculpture then at the turn of the century was clearly following a path in which light would become the leader. The traditional agreement between tactile form (the volume revealed to touch) and visual form (the shadow interpreted by the eye) was destined to break. The new visual effects introduced in art, such as reflection, transparency, refraction, do not correspond to and cannot be comprehended by a tactile experience.

There is no doubt that light-art is still in its embryonic stage. Technical and especially financial means continue to hamper the light-artist of the '60's as they did his far-sighted precursors. In the '40's Moholy-Nagy complained that "... if a painter-sculptor attempts something in the way of 'light sculpture', his enthusiasm soon encounters practical obstacles, since private means are not sufficient for comprehensive experimentation."[2] When younger artists finally awoke to the infinite possibilities of the light-medium, they found themselves unprepared to cope with a tremendously advanced and specialized technology. However, although this increasing specialization brings ever new difficulties for the artist, his situation is perhaps improved now, because he has at last understood and accepted the need to cooperate with the scientist.

Taking into account the enormous possibilities light offers for the development of a socially-oriented art (large-scale spectacles, decoration of public buildings, intimate sized works in large editions), one could assume that the remainder of this century will witness an immense development of light-art. *Light moving in space* will perhaps become the main visual idiom with sculpture becoming more and more immaterial. With the present pace of history, one hesitates to prophesy, but it seems possible that the near future will see realized such dreams as the ones expressed by Otto Piene:

"The Northern Lights could be provoked and artificially controlled for monumental light play; that vast light symbols will be the new monuments of cities and will be the cities' air traffic signs as well; a play in the sky of artificial rainbows, caused by artificial clouds or water beams which refract light rays of great dimensions; peaceful use of clean atom bombs under intelligent control for stratospheric fireworks on festive occasions; scientific research on air reflections and growing from this research, directed, repeatable and changing productions of mirages; the taming of laser beams for aesthetic purposes; light ballets on and in artificial cloud blankets."[3]

We may still live to see it all.

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* This introduction is made up of excerpts from an article entitled "Sculptured Light" which appears in *Art International*, Vol. XI-10, December, 1967, pg. 29.

Footnotes

1. G. Kepes, Language of Vision, Chicago, 1944, p. 154.
2. L. Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision*, 1928; 3rd rev. ed., New York, 1946, p. 77.
3. From a mimeographed lecture by Piene, "Tomorrow and the Rainbow: About Light and Light-Art", 1966.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

MARTHA BOTO
French (born Argentina), b. 1925

Clavier Electronique
17–3/4 x 17–3/4 x 12 inches

Lent by Howard Wise Gallery, New York

CHRYSSA
American (born Greece), b. 1933

Fragments for The Gates To Times Square VI
43 x 34–1/16 x 27–1/16 inches, 1966

Lent by The Pace Gallery, Columbus, Ohio

HUGO DEMARCO
French (born Argentina), b. 1932

Platfond Lumiere Noir
8 x 47–1/2 x 47–1/2 inches

Lent by Howard Wise Gallery, New York

STANLEY LANDSMAN
American, b. 1930

Shennandoah
20 x 59 x 24 inches, 1967

Lent by Artist

JULIO LE PARC
French (born Argentina), b. 1928

Luminous Column
41–3/4 x 12–1/2 x 12–1/2 inches, 1963

Continuel Lumiere (Boite Lumineuse Bleu)
48 x 48 x 6–1/4 inches

Lent by Howard Wise Gallery, New York

Continuel Lumiere
69 x 63 x 6 inches, 1966

Lent by Katherine White Reswick

MANFREDO MASSIRONI
Italian, b. 1937

Variable Light Reflections
22 x 22 x 11 inches

Lent by Artist

PRESTON McCLANAHAN
American, b. 1933

Mirage
67–1/2 x 45 x 33 inches (dimensions of largest of four units), 1967–68

Lent by Howard Wise Gallery, New York

BOYD MEFFERD
American, b. 1941

Beams
96 x 12 x 12 inches (two units), 1967

Lent by Artist, courtesy Nancy Singer Gallery, St Louis

OTTO PIENE
German, b. 1928

Electric Rosebush
27–1/2 x 20–7/8 inches

Lent by Milwaukee Art Center, Gift of the Trustees in memory of Harry Lynde Bradley, 1967

GREGORIO VARDANEGA
French (born Italy), b. 1932

Coleurs en Diffusion
22–1/4 x 22–1/4 x 5 inches, 1965

Lent by Howard Wise Gallery, New York

Some of the works in this exhibition are for sale.
For further information please call Extension 331.